

Of Belonging and Loss



Off shore, men fish in sky blue boats. They look as though they are floating on rivulets of light. They know they cannot go too far, they know the risks. One man already had a boat seized. The fish are small close to the shore. It's not enough. Where the ocean's lip meets the sand children chase waves. They scream as the whitewater curls around their small toes.

In the summer, when the air is static with heat, fat drops of ice cream dry fast on the footpaths. The beach is swollen with bodies seeking refuge in the water.

All the voices, the laughter, the music seem to blend in resonant frequency, the hum of joy.

There are 14 mosques in Rimal and they choose this one today, its blue dome inflated with calls of the Qur'an, the air tightened, resonant with sound, pulled tight as if on the bow of a Rababeh.

They are renovating the hospital. Soon the new maternity ward will be finished, and more incubators, more space, better facilities will mark the first moments of a life, will be a world in which to open eyes for the first time, deep and searching.

They are doing yoga on a rooftop when a jet flies low overhead. They reach for each other in instinct, try to cover each other's bodies. Today it is nothing, but the air feels charged. A familiar current.

The Omari Mosque bends the light around until it is soft. Two young boys pray with their legs folded, their feet tucked under.

An older man looks out through the colonnade, resting against a pillar. Inside, the carpet is the colour of the ocean at dusk and threads of gold mark the direction of Mecca.

She packs their favourite food into small boxes for the day. They are too old for it now but she does it anyway. If she stands in the right place in the kitchen a sliver of ocean appears in the window. In the afternoons the sun makes a similar sliver on the floor. She reads and when the children return they regale her with their days, the sweat and energy of the boxing gym, the dramas of the schoolyard.

The park entrance is the void of a minaret in white stone.

Behind it, the legs of palms grow slender and mark the path, step by step.

In a plaza, under an awning, a group of women teach young children the art of tatreez. Parts of the cyprus trees are symbolised and embroidered. The women have tough fingers and careful hands, they can stitch without looking while they guide the children, the shade of buildings fall to meet them.

but the warmth of the day lingers.

The power is out again so the store stays open in the shadows. She has a safety box of cash behind the till for sales, but most people have accounts set up. She notices that her father often crosses out debts but she doesn't see the money coming in. His prayer mat is rolled behind the counter. She runs a finger over the hem and hears him moving in the house above her. In his soft footsteps she feels a surge of love.

Her bedroom is shades of blushed cheeks in love. She chose everything, the sofa, the photos of family, the art. She is a beautician, and all her favourite products are arranged on the desk like a small city, you could walk your fingers through the streets. At dusk the room blushes hard, the mirror making sapphires of light on the rug. In only a few weeks she will open her own store, she will bring beauty to people, she will show them what she sees in them.

A large group of siblings eat barbecued lamb and chicken under fruit trees and play cards. Sometimes they pull at an orange and skin it over the table, its flesh dripping. Barbed wire curls like a tongue above them, silent but saying everything.

The sand, boundless and bare, is dragged across once fertile farmland by tanks and heavy trucks and boots. The olive trees were burned. In some places their blackened bodies still stand.

Everything that died

life in Gaza.

His child can't lift her head anymore. He holds her to him and tries to make a space in his own body for her to rest.

In the window, frame slipped, glass teeth catching the light, a wedding dress.

Still she stands like an upturned flower.

You could imagine her slow turn, the softness of tulle in dust, the quietness of that moment, of all the longing.

She has covered her tent in yellow flowers. They pop like streetlights in the grey, but they hang their heads as if in mourning. When she can, she sprays the walls with perfume. She tries to make a soft place, a place of beauty.

skin curls flesh curls

At anhedon, you could feel the deep hold of the city to the shoreline, iron age artefacts and Roman walls and adobe bricks, the makings of Gaza, the gateway to the sea.

can hear music and smell the tang of Zibdiyit from a restaurant on the

In front of the bank, men let their cigarettes stick to their lips while they laugh and count their change.

In the Hammam al-Samara bathhouse, a chequered dome lets in sun but not rain. From the pool below, through the steam, it looks like an iris of light, to watch and to be watched by the sky. Everyone comes here. In the compression of the ancient brick vaults, the stifling heat, you can feel a release.

One man children curdles the air static. The beach is still a refuge. Children stumble over tank tracks to reach the water. A makeshift pier for aid supply is abandoned now. It was never enough. Concrete and ash suspends in the water. It is like swimming through white noise, it is like a storm without rain. They crowd together. Hunger swollen bodies. In anhedon, has been completely destroyed. The makings of Gaza.

When the bombing starts they try to stay away from the windows. They try to stay still and quiet. There is nowhere to hide.

1 mosque today inflated air tight. They try to pray in the streets, their clothes greyed with dust.

There are 7000 people trapped in the hospital. A woman gives birth in a corridor while a child is treated for severe burns. There is no water, no power. When the baby comes, there is no milk.

The word gauze comes from the word Ghazza, women young children because Gaza is renowned for its weaving. In the hospitals supplies are so low that bandages are reused buildings fall after patients have died.

The Omari Mosque young boys folded, against dark under. Resting thousands souls cut.

In front of the bank, men let their cigarettes stick to their lips while they change. compression the stifling heat

In the streets the skin of buildings is muraled with colour signs of resistance and belonging. In parts it is layered, you can see

A faint trace of the past.

He turns the soil over and cups it in his palm. There is life in there. Last spring an Israeli plane flew over and sprayed the crops with herbicide. Everything died. This year the spinach turn their cheeks to the sun. He has piles of nylon ready for the next spray. He walks the rows and counts them, over and over.

There's a show on at Shababek. There are paintings of people on the coastline, their shadows stretch and so does the water, catching the light. In another room colours pool to form scenes of life in Gaza. A boy crouches in the grass below an olive tree, two children make music in the space where two buildings meet. Voices move like water in the fluorescent light of the gallery and you can see friends greet each other, you can feel the togetherness of this space, the opening it makes.

the shadow of an old painting haunting the new one. A corner. The sun crouches lower and lower into the sea. The shadows are long

Everywhere smells of death